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Jack. I'll assume more shapes than Proteus is master of, and appear in different colours like the cameleon—Should I be obliged to undermine your house, glide through your key-hole, or come down through your roof like a thunderbolt, I'll have Rosa—I beg, Sir, you'll not be in a passion.

Sir Went. Leave my house, Sir ; this instant leave my house.

Jack went to the door, then, turning round, and nodding to the baronet, said, keep your temper, Sir Wentworth, I'll have Rosa—and set off, laughing at the frenzy into which he had thrown his worthy old guardian that was.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

ON THE TIME WHEN LETTERS WERE FIRST KNOWN IN IRELAND.

THERE is no subject concerning which greater diversity and obstinacy of opinion have prevailed than the earlier periods of Irish history. The evidence is neither very clear nor very consistent; whilst national prejudices on the one side, and national partialities on the other, have acquired an influence paramount to any derived from sound argument and express testimony. The annals of Ireland are filled with the progress of civilization, and the encouragement given to polite learning, long before any nation in Europe had extricated itself from the shades of ignorance and barbarity. Unfortunately the oldest literary records do not appear to have been written before the tenth century, nearly two thousand years after the supposed introduction of letters into this country.* That those should be viewed in different lights, according to the various systems that have been adopted, is very natural. By such as endeavour to realize the splendid fabric of fiction, they are recommended to the world as displaying every estimable quality in the composition of History; while those who disregard their over strained pretensions bestow on them such epithets† as could only be dictated by a conviction of their insignificance, augmented by that prejudice which would

* We are indebted to Cormac M^cMullan, Archbishop and King, in the year 901, for the Psalter of Cashel, the prime source of information respecting the most ancient History of Ireland. Entire credit cannot be given to it, because written in verse; and the genius of poetry has an indomitable tendency for fiction. The book of Howth comes next in reputation; and indeed seems to be the most faithful record of the traditions of heathen times. The eleventh century gave a beginning to the Annals of Tigomach, a work of high authority, and not unlike the Annals of Innisfallen and of Ulster.—*O'Connor's Diss.* p. 156.

† Deficient in elegance, and uninteresting in the lessons which they exhibit, they (the Irish Annals) might without much disadvantage to the public, be condemned to neglect, and buried in oblivion.—*Webbs' Analysis of Irish History*, p. 148.

uniformly oppose every mark of refinement amongst our heathen ancestors.

The Irish people have been long characterized by a fond attachment to a supposed pristine splendour and magnificence, and it is by following the dictates of this national pride that the exaggerated, and self-confuted tales of our bards have been so long, not only tolerated, but believed and admired.* Since these are the materials which must serve as a basis for the investigation of modern antiquaries, it is naturally to be expected that their conclusions should be equally unstable with the foundation upon which they rest.

The industry and patience of research necessary to collect a few imperfect, and thinly scattered notices; the constant watchfulness and discrimination requisite to guard against falsehood, and detect it;† and the confusion arising from accounts frequently varying; readily tempt the enquirer to prefer the guidance of fancy to sober investigation, and to indulge in conjecture instead of commenting upon evidence. It would not be wonderful if he should disregard difficulties which he was not prepared to overcome, and sometimes cut the knot which he could not untie—there is no part of Irish antiquities upon which authors are more at variance than that which refers to *the time when Letters were first known in the Island*. To enable our readers to form a just estimate of the manner in which the contending parties support their respective opinions, we shall place in juxtaposition the arguments of some of the leaders on both sides, and then very briefly subjoin a few remarks upon the subject.

“Notwithstanding,”‡ says Mr. Beauford, “the circumstantial detail given by the antiquarians and chroniclers of the middle ages relating to the learning and civilization of the ancient Irish, the learned in general have been much divided on the subject; as the testimonies hitherto given have been rather assertions unsupported by proofs and matters of fact, than real history. They have made frequent mention of several species of alphabets used by the Pagan inhabitants

* Irish antiquities have been for centuries past, not only held in contempt by every nation in Europe, but unfortunately our understandings have been degraded at the same time in the eyes of foreigners, for an easy credulity, and an implicit adoption of incredible fictions. It cannot be denied, that our pertinacity in clinging to our mythological tales, gives strong intimation of the want of civilization, and the little progress criticism and sound learning have made amongst us.—*Otho's 1st Letter to Ierneus*, 2d vol. *Collectanea*.

† Besides the fables founded upon the metaphorical flights of the poets, there are others to be met with frequently, in the *Histories of Ireland*, which seem to be the fruit of a fertile imagination alone, and intended to fill up chasms, to amuse ignorant or credulous readers; to delight and tickle the ear, and relieve the tediousness of dry and insipid annals. These are the works of the dark ages, succeeding the ignorance and barbarism introduced among us by the devastations of the Danes.—*Harris' Hib. Fol. Ed.* p. 141.

‡ *Collectanea*, 2d vol. p. 187.

of this Island, but they have given very few specimens of the characters, and none before the conversion to the Christian faith; and, though they often speak of ancient records from which the modern histories are supposed to be taken, few, if any, of these have come down to our time. To obviate in some measure a circumstance which might involve the credit of their historical transactions, they have alleged that in the ravages committed by the Danes,* their records were destroyed or carried off; but though diligent enquiry has been made by several learned persons in Spain, Denmark, and other countries, no such writings have been found. Even the most credible Irish annals begin with a history of the fifth and conclude with the tenth century,† and make not the least mention of Pagan Ireland; and their silence on this point may serve to confirm us in the opinion, not only that the ancient inhabitants had not the use of letters prior to their conversion, but also the assertions of many foreign writers, who, far from considering the Irish of their time a civilized and learned people, in general esteem them a savage and ignorant race."

"The fabricators of Irish antiquities,"‡ says Macpherson, "found that an early knowledge of letters in their country was absolutely necessary to gain credit to the system which they wished so much to establish. Ireland, therefore, was made the seat of polite literature many years before Greece itself rose out of ignorance and barbarity. To remove this support, is to destroy at once the whole fabric of fiction which they possess for their ancient history. Unfortunately for this system, by the testimony of foreign writers, who extended their enquiries to Ireland, the character of its ancient inhabitants is utterly incompatible with that civilization which invariably accompanies any knowledge of letters. It were much to be wished that the writers of that country, who understood the ancient Gaelic, had not given room to suspect that they themselves were conscious of imposture, by their concealing from the public those monuments of their history, from which they pretend to derive their information. But

* It is very certain, that the English, after the conquest, and the Danes before it, destroyed all the books and writings they could meet with, in order, as soon as possible, to make the Irish forget their old laws and customs; but yet there are some remains of those books of laws, many of which were composed before, as well as after the Christian Era, but as they are written in a language, long since disused, they are become at present, as is natural to suppose, utterly unintelligible, both in the text and in the glossary.—*Warner, vol. 1. p. 113.*

Quære.—How did Mr. Warner know that they were composed *before the Christian Era*, if they are unintelligible?

† It is obvious from this, that Mr. Beauford did not credit the Psalters of Tara and Cashel, since they represent the Irish, as being from the remotest antiquity, pious and warlike, inventors of letters, &c.

‡ Introduction to the Hist. of Ant. Ireland, p. 74.

had they given them to the world, it is highly probable that external argument would be very unnecessary to prove that the literature of Ireland commenced with the mission of St. Patrick."

"To compensate,"* says Dr. Pinkerton, "the real picture, some Irish antiquarians have attempted to persuade mankind to a dereliction of common sense and ancient authority, in favour of Irish history. Supposing mankind will consent, these writers will persuade them, that while all other kingdoms in Europe were totally ignorant and barbarous, there were three countries full of civilization and science, Greece, Rome, and Ireland—that the Hebrew, Greek, Roman, and Irish characters were all invented together, on the plains of Sennaar—and that those who say the Irish letters are the same as the old Saxon, and Roman, are as much deceived, as if they called an eagle's egg a hen's, merely because the shape is identically the same. Granting this rivalry of Ireland with Greece and Rome, these writers will compensate the shocking picture of Irish history, after Patrick's time, by a most brilliant scene, for a thousand years before Christ to that period, under the famous Milesians. But as the literati of Europe are under the dominion of certain contemptible prejudices, called a love of truth, and reliance on ancient authority, learning, literary experience, accuracy, honesty, and other empty names, I am obliged to follow the common plan, &c." We might have added the opinions of Innes, Bolandus, Ledwich, and others; but as the substance of their arguments is contained in the extracts already given, we shall proceed to the counter-statement of those who adopt the opposite system.

"The positive assertions,†" says General Vallancey, "of all the ancient Irish Historians, is, that their ancestors received the use of letters directly from the Phenicians; and they all concur in affirming, that several colonies from Africa settled in Ireland. It is evident, both from the order of the Alphabet, and from the figures of the letters in the ancient MSS., that the Irish did not receive the use of letters from St. Patrick. In the Book of Lecan, it is expressly said, in a very ancient piece of prose, speaking of the literature of the Danians, who preceded the Milesians by 200 years, that they composed verses, which were carefully preserved, till the Christian faith was published in Ireland, but were then burned by St. Patrick, as being the invention of the devil. By ascribing verses to Irish poets before Christ, he proves very strongly the use of letters before that time, for

* Essay on Medals, vol. ii. p. 148.

† Collectanea, 2d vol. Preface to Essay on Language; and again p. 53.

it is impossible to conceive, how these verses could be preserved by the help of tradition only, or how the new converts could destroy them, unless they had been committed to writing."

Dr. Rowland* says, "the Irish had learning amongst them, such at least as related to family history and the like; and that they made the best use of it, is not to be questioned. The Druids, less strict than those in Britain in the rules of their profession, scrupled not to record in writing, and thereby transmit to future times, the history of their monarchs, and their princes; the genealogy of their chief tribes; and other occurrences of note. Nine hundred years before Christ, the Metropolitan College of Jewish Druids was established at Tara."

Dr. Raymond,† in order to discover the origin of the Irish nation, took the pains to compare all the European languages, with that of Ireland, and observed but little agreement with any of them. But by examining the Celtic, with the help of Lhuyd's and Pezron's vocabularies, he discovered such an affinity between it and the Irish, as convinced him that they were the same language. He thinks this sufficient to procure credibility to Irish History; for if it can be made out that the use of letters in this island, was as early as the relations in any history allowed to be authentic, then the common objection against the credibility of it—that the knowledge of characters began only after the entrance of Christianity—will be removed.

"If" ‡ says Keating, "St. Patrick first introduced letters into Ireland, they must undoubtedly have been Roman:—and did the Roman alphabet consist of but seventeen letters? were they arranged like ours? or were they of similar structure? But these interrogatories must be answered in the negative; for Cæsar removes so great an obstacle to true history, by telling us, that the Gaulish characters in his day, resembled the Greek; and such are the Irish to this very time. Hence, it is manifest, that the Gauls and Romans had different kinds of alphabets; and the consequence not less so, that the Irish could not have borrowed from them."

Mr. O'Connor§ represents our Beth-luis-nion of the Oghma, as not having the least resemblance to either the Grecian or Roman characters. They are arranged in a different order, and were peculiar, as far as we can discover, to this western nation. Their names, partly Phenician, and partly vernacular, show not only their Asiatic origin, but, their great

* *Mona Antiqua*, p. 29.

† Letter to Lord Inchiquin.

‡ *History of Ireland*, p. 11, vol. 1.

§ *Diss.* pages 34 and 37.

antiquity in the island. These extraordinary facts summed up together, fairly account for the use of letters in Ireland, from the first entrance of the Iberian Spaniards."

It may be thought extraordinary, that we have hitherto taken no direct notice of the Greek and Roman writers, who have mentioned Ireland; but we rather wished to bring forward the evidence of persons who had made this a subject of serious study and inquiry, and who, in so doing, had weighed the very accounts alluded to, than that of individuals, who, to say the least,* could be but very imperfectly acquainted with the country. That we may not seem, however, to overlook any source of information on the question at issue, we shall now, as briefly as possible, advert to their testimony,† which certainly ought neither to be implicitly confided in, nor wholly disregarded. We should not disregard it, because the similarity of their statements, gives us reason to suppose, that they had at least some sort of evidence for what they relate; and we should not confide in it, because part of what they wrote, we ourselves know and experience to be false; because several of the circumstances they mention, exceed all credibility; and lastly, because one of the most reputable writers does not appear to credit his own narration.

‡ Thus, when Julius Cæsar tells us, that a perpetual winter reigns here; || Pomponius Mela, that corn never ripens on account of the inclemency of the weather; § Solinus and Isidore of Seville, that a bird is a rarity, that bees do not exist here, and that the soil is so pernicious to them, that a little of it carried elsewhere destroys them—should we not hesitate to believe, on the veracity of the same persons, that our an-

* The earliest foreign evidence, not to notice that of Orpheus, is found in the first century. Diodorus Siculus, Strabo, &c. represent the Irish as being then in the rudest state of society. The testimony of these writers may not be implicitly confided to, but neither ought it to be entirely disregarded.—*Campbell's Eccles. Strict.* p. 23.

† The descriptions of old Greek and Latin writers, are of no great weight in this case. They received their intelligence from mariners, who had but just fidelity enough to aver, that the climate was of all others the most horrid, and philosophy enough to report that the natives knew no distinction of right and wrong.—*Collectanea*, 2d vol. p. 344.

Quelques uns, comme Pomponius Mela, Solinus, &c. avoient montres leur ignorance par des descriptions arbitraires de cette isle (Hib.) et des peintures outres de la grossièreté et de la barbarité pretendue des ses habitans.—*Abbe Geoghegan His. d'Irlande*, t. 1, p. 11.

Among the ancients, Strabo, Pomponius Mela, and Julius Solinus, have drawn horrible pictures of the manners and customs of the Irish. But these writers agree, that the country was bleak and inhospitable, as the people were savage and barbarous, so that their total ignorance of the nature of the climate, is the best apology for their misrepresentations of its inhabitants.—*O'Halloran*, vol. 1. p. 30, *Introd.*

‡ De Bell. Gall. Lib. 1.

|| De Situ Orbis, Lib. iii. c. 1. He flourished in the 1st century.

§ Polyhist. c. 36. He lived in the 2d century.

cestors were *cannibals, and that they were so inhuman, and so devoid of either religious or moral principles?

After all, we should be satisfied that these authors contented themselves with giving false relations of the manners and customs of our ancestors, since they did not treat other nations with equal moderation. What shall we say to Solinus' account of the Arimaspes, who inhabited near the Caspian sea, and had but one eye; or of the Indians who had but one leg, and yet ran with great speed; or to that of Pomponius Mela, when he describes a people of Egypt, who were †born dumb; another who had no tongue; and a third who had their lips stuck close to each other, with only a little hole under their nostrils? They both concur in ‡representing the Blemeans, as having no heads, but with their face in their breast: the Cynamolgi as dog-headed; the Cercopithecii as adorned with tails; and the Oones, and Hipodes as fitted with horses' hoofs. And lastly, not to multiply examples, should we credit persons who were stupid enough to believe, and ignorant enough to write, that people inhabit the Northern Islands, whose ears are so long as to shelter them from the weather, and render apparel unnecessary; or, that others had their feet so large, that when they lifted up their legs, the soles served as umbrellas to shade ||their owners from the sun?

Claudius Ptolemy certainly depended for his information on the imperfect recitals of seafaring men, who had only seen the extreme coasts of the Island; and, as the Romans never penetrated into the country, they were not in a condition to judge directly of the manners of the natives. If we require evidence of this, it is to be found in Polybius, and Strabo himself; the former of whom assures us that Britain was in his time almost unknown,§ and that Ireland was wholly so; and the latter, after so long an interval, declares that the tes-

* Hibernia inhumana ritu incolarum aspera, gens inhospita; fas atque nefas eodem animo ducunt.—*C. Julius Solinus, as above.*

Cultores ejus (Hiberniæ) inconditi sunt, et omnium virtutum ignari magis quam aliæ gentes; pietatis admodum expertes.—*Pomp. Mela, Lib. 4.*

Agrestissimi Britannorum omnium sunt Hiberni; homines edunt; pro honesto ducunt mortuorum parentum corpora comedere.—*Strabo, Lib. 4. Geog.*

Ferocissimi Gallorum sunt qui sub septentrionibus habitant, dicunt ex illos nonnullos Anthropophagas esse, sicut Britanni qui Frini incolunt.—*Diodorus Siculus Hist. Lib. 5. He lived 44 years before Christ.*

† Alii sine linguis; alii sine sono linguæ, alii labiis etiam coherentibus nisi quod subnaribus etiam fistula est, per quam bibere possunt, &c.—*Lib. iii. Art. Æthiop.*

‡ Blemias, sed nos eos qui vicina rubro mari incolunt, credunt truncos nasci parte qua caput est os tamen et oculos habere in pectore.—*Polyhis. c. 44.*

§ Legimus Monocelos quoque ibi nasci singulis cruribus et singulari pernicitate qui ubi defendi se velint, a calore resupinati plantarum suarum magnitudine inumbrentur.—*Idem, c. 65.*

§ Somniant, siqui de iis (Hibs.) vel loquantur vel scribant.—*Polyb. Lib. iii. p. 88.—He lived 124 years before Christ.*

timony upon which his relations were founded was unworthy of credit.* As to Cæsar, though he was in error respecting the climate of Ireland,† there is no reason to suppose him mistaken in what he tells of the Druids of Britain, whom he represents (Pliny the elder in his Natural History,‡ and Pomponius Mela|| corroborate his description,) as well acquainted with written characters, as possessing a species of Theology, Astronomy, and other sciences; and as using in all their affairs the Greek characters, except in their mysteries, which their laws forbade them to put in writing.§ That the Druids were established in Ireland, does not admit a doubt, and it is as certain that a connection subsisted between them.¶ Might it not then be concluded, upon tolerably good authority, that they possessed equal advantages?

Thus have we examined, as briefly as possible, the principal ancient writers who have mentioned Ireland; and shall now proceed, with equal brevity, to state our objections to the arguments contained in the quotations we have taken from the favourers of its literature.

There is a decided inconsistency in Gen. Vallancey's accounts of the Irish characters. Thus in one place (of the Collectanea) he says, "before writing on parchment was introduced by St. Patrick, the Irish had two alphabets, one for the Druids, and another for the Bards;" while elsewhere he mentions, "that no other characters have been found in use among the ancient Irish but the old Roman or Etruscan." Here there is no exception whatever in favour of the Druids: the contradiction between the two statements, therefore, is decisive, and consequently the value of his evidence on the subject much diminished. His argument, from the arrangement of the letters, is of little value: as we have good authority for asserting that the Irish of the middle ages were very arbitrary in placing their alphabet. How much we ought to esteem proofs drawn from the Book of Lecan, a work scarcely four hundred years old, may be inferred from the opinion we have given of the Irish Chronicles; but, even were it to be depended on, his conclusion is very erroneous, for it is quite possible for verses to be handed down by tradition alone,

* De Hibernia nihil habeo certi quod dicam.—*Strabo Geog. Lib. 4, p. 123.*

† Neque fas esse existimavit ea literis mandare, quam in reliquis fere rebus publicis, privatisque rationibus græcis literis utuntur.—*De Gall. Bell, Lib. 6, c. 13.*

‡ *Nat. Hist. Lib. 16, c. 44.*

|| Druidas terræ, mundi magnitudinem et formam, motus cæli et siderum, et quid Diï velint, scire se profiteri.—*De Situ Orbis, Lib. 3, c. 1.*

§ Plurima ex veteribus usitatis adhuc manent. Nec quicquam fere in Hibernia nisi in ceremoniis, et religionis ritibus est mutatum.—*Buchan. Hist. Scot. p. 60.*

¶ That the traditions of the Irish are uniform in maintaining this point (Druidism), it is unnecessary for me particularly to state. And it were equally superfluous to repeat the detail of the numerous vestiges of Irish heathenism which are still remaining, and which are clearly and most unequivocally Oriental or Druidic.—*Webb's Analysis of Irish Antiq. p. 52.*

without the help of writing ; as is evident from what has been recorded of the Druids, and the experience of every person who has heard how the collection of Irish melodies was recently formed.

Dr. Rowland makes a gratuitous assumption respecting the Irish Druids. We have already acknowledged the probability that they possessed the same advantages as those of Britain ; but found no authority that could warrant either him or us to assert, that, less strict in the rules of their profession, they applied themselves to any branch of polite literature. An assertion such as this, which is devoid of even a shadow of proof, must no less invalidate his testimony than the inconsistency of the celebrated author already alluded to.

Whatever advantages the supporters of ancient Irish learning might otherwise have derived from the labours of Dr. Raymond, are rendered nugatory by a passage in the quotation we made from his works. He only tries to extricate us out of one difficulty by throwing us into another, since there is no less diversity of opinion about the period at which Irish History may be considered as assuming an authentic shape, than there is about the person by whom, and the time when letters were first introduced into the Island.

There is an obvious discrepancy between Keating and O'Connor in their respective accounts of the Irish Alphabet. The one representing it as bearing a resemblance to the Greek ; the other, as unlike either Grecian or Roman characters, and peculiar to this Western nation. We may therefore introduce the words of a third party,* whose testimony we consider as conclusive :—" Would any man, of the smallest antiquarian knowledge, assert that the Beth-luis-nion, or Irish elements, are of Asiatic origin, or indulge in the most bombastic encomiums on them, if he had previously looked over the alphabets of other nations ? Even a partial enquiry would have convinced him that they and the Anglo-Saxon letters are identically the same ; must not Mr. O'Connor blush, therefore, when he compares his Dissertation with the twenty-first and twenty-second pages of the *Ogygia Vindicated*, where these wonderful Phenician letters are derived from their genuine source—the corrupt Roman of the fifth century ?"

We would fondly persuade ourselves that this nation possessed all the advantages its panegyrists bestow upon it ; but, even when the imagination is most actively employed in conjuring up scenes of splendour and illumination, truth breaks in and the delusion vanishes. In making this admission, however, we are not disposed to allow that letters were

* Otho's third letter, 2d vol. Collec.

first introduced by St. Patrick. Nennius, Colgin, and Ware, indeed, relate that he brought hither the Roman characters, but they certainly do not exclude all others;† on the contrary, they suppose that the natives possessed some peculiar to themselves. We are free to acknowledge that there is a great scope for diversity of opinion respecting the origin of the Beth-luis-nion. Several of the letters in the ancient alphabets we have seen resemble the Greek, and several the Saxon. In reality, time has made so sensible a change in their form that what they were like at one period they were very unlike at another. This is the substance of our opinion. We do not dispute that written characters were known before the Christian era, but then we do not think the existence of what might properly be styled literature by any means proved.

Let us confess the truth, that the farther we go back in our history, the more we find it enveloped in fable, and shrouded in darkness; and let us not consider it a species of sacrilege to disperse the gloom which involves the commencement of it. Though in destroying the fantastic fables, which deform the obscurity of our ancient records, we perhaps bury whole ages in darkness, let us be convinced that oblivion is better than unauthenticated fame; and neither be ashamed nor afraid to acknowledge, that our ancestors, like those of most nations in the world, were barbarians; nor ought we to sacrifice the native and undenied endowments of our country, to the bulky phantom of a fictitious antiquity. Unlike some modern antiquarians, we do not despise so late an illumination of this country, as the epoch at which Christianity was introduced; nor would we make an excursion into pathless mazes for two thousand years before that period, during which the Milesian monarchy is described, as one of the most renowned upon earth, and flourishing in all the arts and sciences, which embellish society and dignify human nature. We leave to others the trouble of proving this field of fiction, where the gleanings of a long, long time, have only, we fear, accumulated evidence to confirm a millenium of poverty and ignorance.

In a subsequent article we may introduce some additional observations on Irish affairs, connected with the same period,

* *Præter characteres vulgares utebantur veteres Hiberni variis occultis scribendi formulis, seu artificiis ogum dictis, quibus secreta sua scribebant.*—*Ware Antiq. Fol. Ed. p. 2.*

Ne donnaient pas l'exclusion a toutes sortes de caracteres, chez les Milesiens, au contraire ils bien supposent des caracteres propres a leur langue.—*Abbe Geogh. Hist. p. 50.*